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# Bill Pielou: Model of professionalism and integrity

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## Bill Pielou: Model of professionalism and integrity

**Shortly before** William Percival Pielou retired from Furman in 1991, a group of biology majors took a vote and decided that if they could choose any department professor to be the grandfather to their children, Pielou was the man.

To the hundreds of students who studied under Pielou, such recognition would come as no surprise. Kind and considerate, thoughtful and soft-spoken, Bill Pielou was a model professor. When he died July 28 at the age of 85, Furman lost an outstanding teacher and a consummate gentleman.

Born in Detroit, Mich., he was a Navy veteran of World War II who went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Michigan and a doctorate from Michigan State. He taught biology on the college level for 42 years, the last 27 at Furman, where he arrived in 1964 after a stint at Northern Arizona University.

It is doubtful that any Furman biology major made it through the Pielou years without taking his course in morphology and development. I remember spending hours in the lab looking through a microscope at slides of chick embryos in various stages of development. I only wish I'd had the patience and the skill to reproduce on paper what Bill Pielou showed us in class.

Morphology and development was a required course. But many of us enjoyed another Pielou class just as much, if not more: ornithology.

In 1976, my final spring at Furman, I chose ornithology as an elective. It was a small class that met in the old histology lab of Plyler Hall, and we really bonded as a group. We did lots of traditional classroom work while learning avian anatomy and the physiology and taxonomy of birds.

Andrea Behrman '76 was in the class, and as we reminisced about it recently, three things still stand out.

Our close-knit group decided to make T-shirts. They were bright red with white letters, and decorated with a cardinal. I ended up giving mine to a relative, who still is an avid birdwatcher.

Then there were the early morning bird-watching trips around campus. With Dr. Pielou leading the way, we would trudge through the dew-covered grass carrying field glasses, field guides and pocket-sized notebooks. I still have mine, filled with jottings and notes about our sightings.

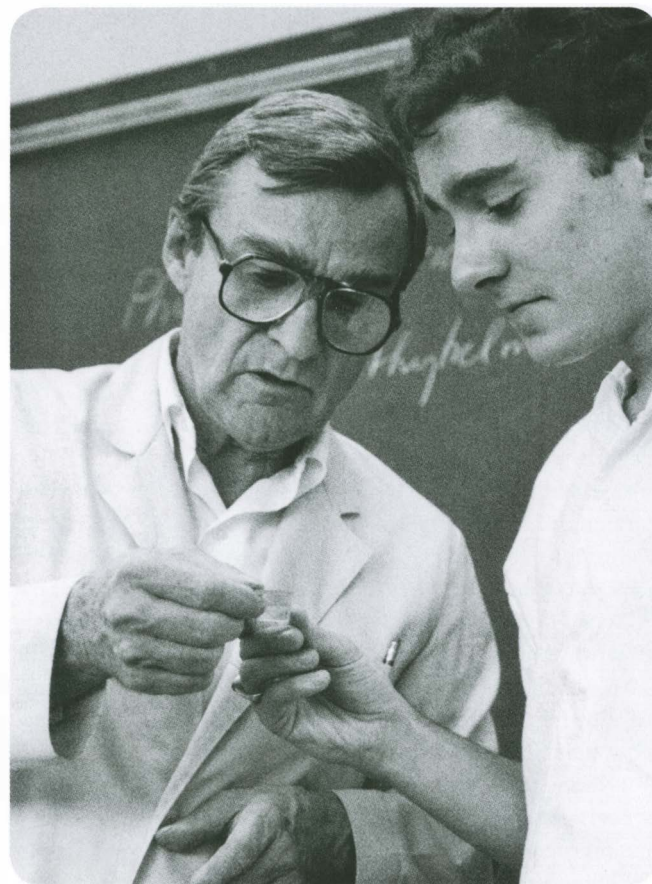
The third was the independent studies we were required to do. Each of us was expected to present two reports. I chose "Breeding Parasitism" and "Avian Mortality." To the non-bird lover, those topics may sound terribly boring, but I learned so much while preparing my reports that I think I could still deliver most of them from memory today.

Such was the impact Bill Pielou could have.

When I returned to work at Furman in 2002, I ran into Dr. Pielou at a football game. He was 80 years old but had not aged a day since our last encounter in 1976. All he lacked was his white lab coat.

We had a wonderful talk. He was extremely happy in retirement, doing odd jobs (he was quite the handyman), enjoying his grandchildren and devoting much time to his church, St. James Episcopal. At his funeral, we learned that he was the heart and soul behind almost every improvement project at the growing church.

In 1991, John Snyder, then chair of the biology department, wrote an article about Bill Pielou's retirement for *Furman Reports*,



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the old alumni publication. Snyder said that the department without his colleague wouldn't provide "quite the same level of concern for our students, in and out of the classroom. And there will be just a bit less of that old-fashioned sense of loyalty and duty to Furman."

Those words hold true now, as much as ever.

Bill Pielou is survived by his wife, Peggy, who worked in the Furman library for a number of years; daughters Sally Pielou '79 and Mary Clark; and three grandchildren. Memorials: St. James Episcopal Church Organ Fund, 301 Piney Mountain Rd., Greenville, S.C. 29609.

— TOM TRIPLITT '76

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